



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Board of Public Works Approves Harriet Tubman State Park Visitor Center Construction Project

(Annapolis, MD) -- The Board of Public Works (BPW) today approved a \$13.9 million construction contract for the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park Visitor Center in Dorchester County. Design and construction is being managed by the Maryland Department of General Services (DGS) in collaboration with the Maryland Departments of Natural Resources (DNR), Transportation (State Highway Administration) and Business and Economic Development (DBED), as well as the National Park Service. The project honors the life and legacy of Harriet Tubman, a Dorchester County native who courageously led slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad.



“Harriet Tubman is one of our country’s greatest heroes and one of Maryland’s greatest legends,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “The State Park and Visitor Center will give travelers a unique opportunity to connect with her extraordinary life by experiencing the landscape where Tubman guided so many to freedom. The magnitude of her contributions to our country, and the cause of freedom, will now be fully realized.”

The park will share Tubman’s remarkable life story through exhibits and programs exploring her childhood, her time as a conductor of the Underground Railroad and her advocacy for justice. It will also serve as a welcome and orientation point along the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway and within the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument. Located next to the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, the project also includes a memorial garden, picnic pavilion and walking paths.

“DGS is proud to be an integral part of a project with tremendous national and historical significance,” said DGS Secretary Alvin C. Collins. “The course of history was changed right here in Maryland by a woman who believed so strongly in the fight for freedom that she risked her own life time and again. We are honored to join the effort to preserve Harriet Tubman’s legacy and ensure her story continues to be a source of inspiration.”

In March 2013, President Obama created the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument, which includes the State Park, through a presidential proclamation. A partnership has been established between the National Park Service and the Maryland Park Service to operate the new facility and share programming responsibilities.

“Today is a landmark occasion after years of preparation and planning,” said DNR Secretary Joseph Gill. “Thanks to the hard work and collaboration of many people, a beautiful tribute to our nation’s famed freedom fighter will soon stand in the rural landscape where she led slaves to freedom — a tribute that will showcase her courageous story and ensure her legacy lives on forever.”

The project is partially federally funded with \$8.5 million from the Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP) Grant secured by the State Highway Administration.

“The name Harriet Tubman is synonymous with freedom, bravery and justice because of her heroic endeavors as a conductor in the Underground Railroad,” said Transportation Secretary James T. Smith, Jr. “This Visitor Center is a fitting tribute to her strength and courage in helping guide slaves on their journey to freedom. We are honored to be partners in a project that will stand as a monument to her legacy for generations to come.”

“Harriet Tubman’s story is one of self-sacrifice, courage and determination. Born a slave, she risked both her freedom and her life to ensure that others could live as free men and women,” said DBED Secretary Dominick E. Murray. “We are so pleased to be part of this project that will memorialize Harriet Tubman’s contributions to our state and nation, and ensure her story lives on.”

The Department of Business and Economic Development, through the Maryland Office of Tourism Development, has provided technical and financial assistance for this initiative since 1999. The majority of assistance focused on developing the region as a destination for both domestic and international visitors, marketing the byway and leading the effort for federal recognition as an All-American Road and a national monument.

Along with the \$8.5 million TEP grant, funding for the project includes: \$3.5 million in State funding, a \$1.1 million Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant from the National Park Service and two grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development totaling \$836,384.

The contract approved today was awarded to W.M. Schlosser Construction Co. of Hyattsville, Maryland. Construction is expected to be completed early 2016.

Contact:

Michelle Parker
Department of General Services
michelle.parker@maryland.gov
410.382.0212